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The Current Price Situation, 1996

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The trend for library materials prices continued in 1996 to be double digit price increases for serials and single digit increases for monographs. The picture for other types of materials is less clear.

The situation for monographs is summarized well by **Celia Wagner** in her column, *Book Pricing Update*, "The Slowing Train: Ten Years of Monographic Price Increases." (*Against the Grain*, November 1996, p.60). As she aptly noted: the price rise for monographs is slowing. For example, Blackwell/North America shows the average price of a monograph rising by only .5% for fiscal 1995/96 over fiscal 1994/95, from \$54.02 to \$54.32. Yankee's round-up of publisher title output for 1994/95 showed increases in the range of 3.31% (selected university presses) and 2.19% (selected scholarly trade and professional presses). **Donna Alsbury's** "College Book Price Information, 1995" (*Choice*, April 1996), showed an increase level of .5% between 1994 and 1995 after a 2.0% decrease between 1993 and 1994. The Library and Information Statistics Unit of **Loughborough University** in its "Average Prices of USA Academic Books" reports that 1994/95 to 1995/96, the change in average price was .1% whereas CPI prices went up 3.5%. Over five years, they report an increase of 17.2% while CPI prices went up 18.2%. Thus, libraries are seeing very slow increases after steady 4-6% increases, with an occasional double-digit increase, over the past ten years.

For serials, the double-digit situation remains the same. According to the U.S. Periodical Price Index for 1996, "after a brief respite, serial price increases returned to double-digit percentage increases last year (*American Libraries*, May 1996, p.97)." The overall average price for American periodicals, not including Russian translations, moved from \$149.46 to \$165.61 or a 10.85 increase. In EBSCO's periodical price survey, covering 2,252 journals in the United States, the price increase was 12.14% going from \$261.31 to \$293.03 (*Library Journal*, April 15, 1996, p. 48).

Again EBSCO's study showed a double-digit increase. The report from EBSCO also notes that libraries purchasing foreign titles saw significant increases if the titles were foreign. Between 1994 and 1995, the dollar lost 9% in value and, as a result, U.S. libraries ended up paying an increase of nearly 20% for foreign sci-

ence and social science journals (*Ibid.*, p. 49).

ARL (Association of Research Libraries) statistics always summarize well the situation for libraries. According to the 94/95 ARL Statistics, published in 1996, over the past ten years (1986-1995), the average annual percent change for serial unit prices has climbed 11.4% whereas the monograph unit price has changed by 5.9%. Given budgets at CPI levels or less, libraries have purchased fewer monographs (-3.1%) and serials (-1.0%), in order to address these expenditure rates. As a result the interlibrary borrowing has increased by twice over this ten year period. It is clear that serial prices are still driving the overall costs of materials upwards at a rate which libraries cannot afford. A further complication is the rising proportion (some state 8-12% of a materials budget) for electronic materials.

The EBSCO Survey begins to look at the prices of electronic journals. They note that the 1995 ARL *Directory of Electronic Journals, Newsletters, and Academic Discussion Lists* includes a total of 139 peer reviewed E-Journals. Of these only 13 or 9% charge a fee. The average cost of these journals is \$754 per year (opcit., *Library Journal*, p. 46), but these titles also have many different prices depending on users, paper subscriptions, etc.

The trend towards purchasing electronic materials is diluting the ability of librarians to project prices of materials. Librarians seeking to project the annual costs of materials usually rely on the price trends of materials from their own libraries and they often verify these trends by looking at national price indexes produced by ALA's Library Materials Price Index Committee. These indexes have been produced by this committee since 1955 or over 40 years. Recently, however, with the advent of electronic materials for which the pricing situation is unclear, the pricing of serials in dollars, and new pricing practices, it is harder to rely on national projections as being representative. At the Charleston meeting in 1996, the following factors were indicated as complicating the national pricing picture:

Electronic materials: Most publishers have not determined how they will price their titles. Some require that a library purchase the paper copy. Others recommend special equipment. Some publishers have backfiles and others do not. Some



offer an introductory price and, once a library retains a title, the price rises.

Dollar Prices: The cost factors determining the actual cost of a title can be hidden by a dollar price. For example, a title published in Holland costs the publishers Dutch guilders. How much the change in the cost of a title may depend on other circumstances; for example, if the dollar strengthens, the dollar price of a serial title may not reflect this change. In other words, the price of the title may not go down despite this change.

Consortia: Many consortia members now join together to gain pricing concessions from publishers and vendors. Some libraries are members of more than one consortium.

Package Deals: Frequently publishers offer libraries different packages of journals whereby a library can receive two or three journals free of cost by buying a certain group of titles.

License Agreements: Many institutions have a special arrangement to get a certain number of access ports for a title, particular backfiles, or special equipment.

Long term agreements: Publishers are now considering the possibility of offering better prices for a guarantee that a library will purchase a title over three or four years.

In summary, the list price, used by the national indexes, may gradually bear no resemblance to actual pricing of a title for a local library. Thus, for the future, using national price trends as a baseline for local library costs may no longer be as useful as previously thought. As the number of variables grows, the prices to local institutions will vary widely. Despite this trend, the national price indexes will prove useful as a historical measure. The Library Materials Price Index Committee of the Association for Library Collections and Technical Services of the American Library Association will continue its efforts to record the price changes of library materials. 🐾